The Middlebury Campus

VOL. CXXII, No. 16 MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT, MARCH 13, 2025 middleburycampus.com

Architects solicit student input for new museum

By RACHELLE TALBERT
Copy Editor

As Middlebury moves forward in the process of designing its new art museum, the architects responsible for its construction have begun to solicit input from students and faculty. On Tuesday, March 4, architects Chelsea Grassinger and Hannah Bacon of Allied Works — who are spearheading the museum's design — visited campus for a town-hall-style meeting to hear from students. The event marked their second visit to campus, having previously hosted a student listening session after a presentation on Jan. 16.

Last Tuesday's event began with the architects and Middlebury faculty engaging in one-on-one conversation with students over pizza. Grassinger and Bacon asked student attendees for their opinions on the current placement of the Middlebury College Museum of Art within the Mahaney Arts Center (MAC) and their interest in the new museum, which will be located where Battell Hall currently stands. The event then transitioned into a presentation by both architects regarding the details and project goals of the museum.

Battell Hall is scheduled to be

Continued on Page 2

CONSTRUCTION COMPANY CONTRACTED BY MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE ADDRESSES WORKER SAFETY VIOLATIONS

TOM NEVINS / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Vermont Construction Company has previously been contracted for several roofing jobs on college buildings, including at UVM and Middlebury, since it was founded in 2016.

By RYAN McELROY
Editor In Chief

Following allegations of dangerous housing and job site conditions for its workers, the Vermont Construction Company signed a preliminary agreement with labor rights nonprofit Building Dignity and Respect Standards Council in January to work toward new safety standards. The company has previously worked at Middlebury College on at least one roofing project, although the college has said it does not expect to use Vermont Construction Company in the future.

This fall the town of Colchester, Vt. repeatedly cited Vermont Construction Company for placing workers in "grossly hazardous and unsafe" conditions, issuing emergency evacuation orders for substandard buildings, as first reported by VTDigger.

The company paid over $13,000 in fines last year for lacking work site protections and providing crammed non-residential housing for workers. State and town inspectors found that the industrial buildings used as worker housing lacked required fire detection or suppression equipment, according to Seven Days. In addition, the company received three Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) violations last year for having workers at high elevations without proper fall protection measures.

The Vermont Construction Company prominently displays Middlebury College as a recent client on the main page of its

Continued on Page 5

Vermonters approve $14.5 million budget on Town Meeting Day

By MANDY BERGHELA
Senior Local Editor

Approximately 125 Middlebury residents gathered for their annual town meeting on Monday, March 3, where they voted in favor of a $14,548,535 budget for the 2026 fiscal year. Of this year's 10 articles, four were voted on directly in the meeting and the other six were voted on in a ballot election the following day.

Middlebury residents voted in overwhelming support of a $49 million upgrade to the town's wastewater treatment plant, $2 million in improvements to a water pump off of Rogers Road and $1 million for a stormwater treatment system in the Adams Acres subdivision, according to the Addison Independent. Residents also approved a $51,719,284 Addison Central School District budget for the 2025–2026 school year.

Town Meeting Day is a cherished political tradition in the Green Mountain State. Vermonters and local public officials come together each year for Town Meeting Day, a cherished political tradition where neighbors discuss local issues, make collective decisions and actively participate in

Continued on Page 4

MIDDLEBURY SKI TEAM PLACES SIXTH AT NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS, BEST FINISH SINCE 2008

COURTESY PHOTO / @FLYINGPOINT

Bradshaw Underhill '25 competed in his final NCAA Championships, concluding his Panther career with two All-American honors in slalom.

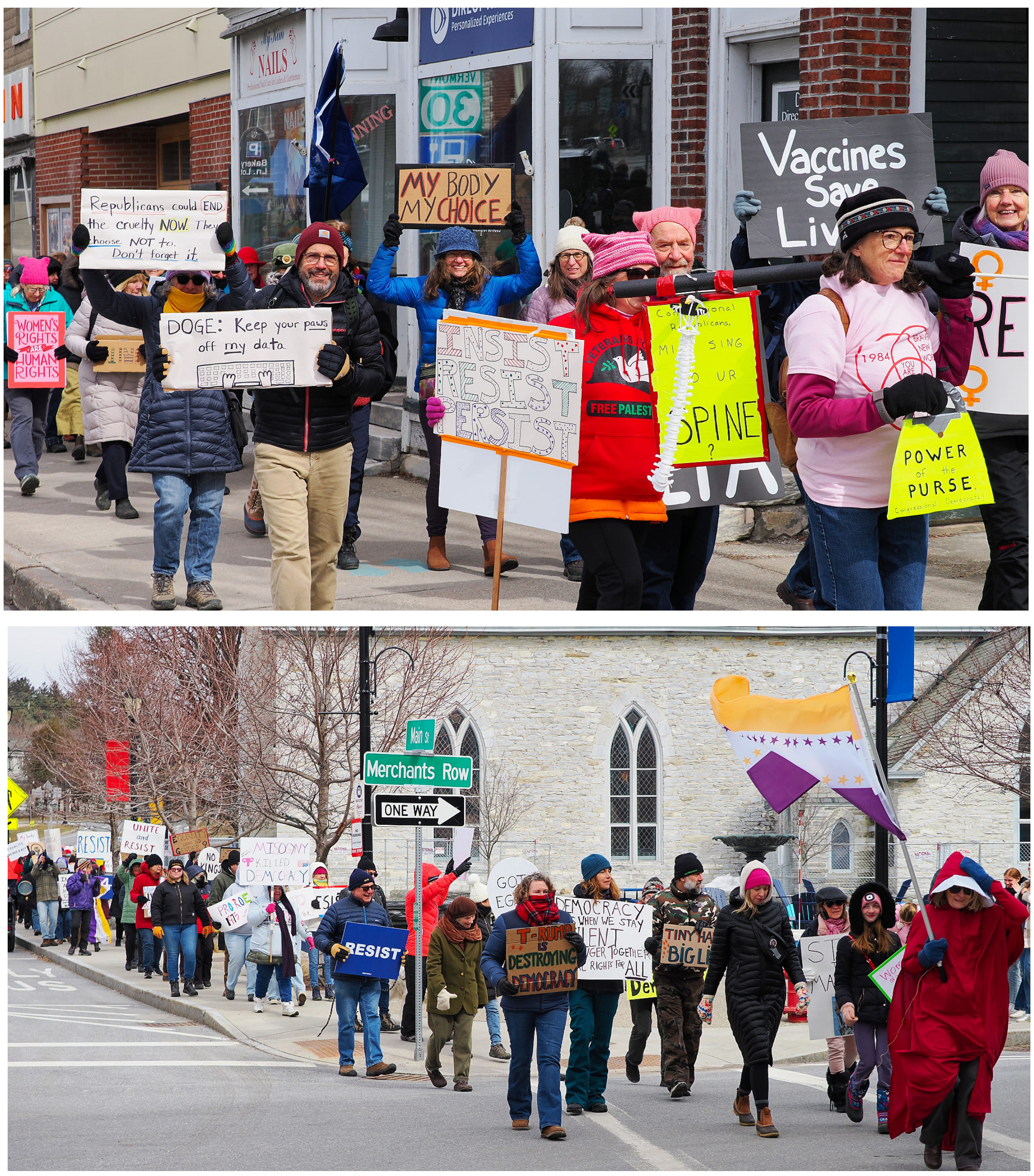
By TING CUI
Senior Sports Editor

As the snow melts across Vermont's mountains, the Middlebury ski team capped their season with a flourish, racing to sixth place at the 2025 NCAA Championships — their best finish since 2008. The four-day competition at Dartmouth College saw the Panthers tally 252.5 points against scholarship powerhouses, with the University of Utah claiming its fifth title in six years with 590 points. The University of Colorado placed second and Dartmouth College rounded out the podium in third.

Taking place against a backdrop of bad weather and rough conditions, the event highlighted both individual excellence and team depth for the Panthers, who qualified the maximum 12 athletes for the championships. Only 10 athletes competed, because Kjersti Moritz '28 and Dominic Shackleton '28 were busy representing their countries at the International Ski Federation's World Junior Championships. The Nordic side

Continued on Page 11

PHOTOS OF THE WEEK: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY PROTEST


Vaccines Save Lives
MY BODY MY CHOICE
Republicans could END the cruelty NOW The house NOT for... Don't forget it
DOGE: Keep your paws off my data
WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS
INSIST RESIST
SPINE
POWER OF THE PURSE
Merchants Row
ONE WAY
RESIST

COURTESY PHOTOS / JONATHAN BLAKE

NEWS

Muslim students celebrate Ramadan on campus
By ELLA CALLAHAN

Snow Bowl hosts third annual Student Ski Day
By NOAH WILLSON

▸ PAGE 2

LOCAL

Vergennes Opera House to begin All Access Project in April
By MADINAH ROSEN

▸ PAGE 5

OPINIONS

Losing faith or keeping hope?
By GEORGE MARDSEN

Middlebury is our home — let's start treating it that way
By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

▸ PAGE 6

ARTS & CULTURE

Darkoom Club captures Middlebury life
By ANTHONY CINQUINA

Pianist Iyad Sughayer strikes all the right keys
By YUHAN ZHANG

▸ PAGE 9

SPORTS

Panthers softball sweeps Clarkson in season opener
By BROOKE FRIBERG

Seven Questions with Alexa Mustafaj '25, women's basketball
By VICTOR KORTE

▸ PAGE 11

Museum architects solicit student input with plans to tear down Battell in summer 2026

Continued from Page 1

torn down the summer of 2026, with construction of the museum to occur in 2027 and 2028. The design for the new museum will not be completed until the end of March 2026, leaving plenty of time for open discussion before the plans are finalized.

“We really rely on the people and place and program to conceive our designs,” Bacon said during the presentation.

Grassinger and Bacon focused their presentation on the design process, focusing on soliciting student feedback. Grassinger described a space that would be open, exciting and homey. Bacon spoke of a potential student space called “The Hearth,” conceptualized to be centered around a fireplace where students can gather.

“We’d love for it to be warm and comfortable, and somewhere where there’s a big sale table, and open mic night happening. Or maybe it’s where a café goes,” Bacon said.

Grassinger and Bacon intend to weave the museum into the landscape. They mentioned conversations with students who often pass Battell on walks across campus and hope the new building can be maintained as a natural crossroads.

They then opened the discussion to students in the audience to share their comments and concerns. Many concentrated on how the space will be integrated into the greater Middlebury community, considering its central location on campus. Juan Salazar ’27, an Architectural Studies major and co-president of the student organization Architecture Table, referenced how the view of Battell Beach — something that a new art museum may obstruct — is a beloved part of campus.

“I think we have the opportunity, going back to that central space, to introduce cuts into it to sort of see through or beyond. I mean, we really love the sectional nature of the site and we’re really embracing the opportunity for overlooks,” Grassinger said in response.

Still, Bacon confirmed that the new museum will have to be taller than Battell Hall due to Battell’s unsustainably low ceilings. The current plan is to build the museum to be three stories tall.

Other students raised questions about the environmental sustainability of the project. Concerned by Bacon expressing her desire for the museum to be a “beacon of light,” Architectural Studies major Kurt Le ’26 asked how the architects intended to address the space’s potential light pollution. Others asked about their usage of sustainable energy — would there be solar panels installed?

The architects shared that Allied Works is working with the Dean of Sustainability and Environmental Affairs Jack Byrne and the Sustainability Solutions Lab (SSL) and is committed to receiving the LEED Gold certification, which signifies a building’s high sustainability performance. As the project is still in the early stages of design, Grassinger confirmed that solutions to potential environmental problems are still being workshopped, and the team has every intention to listen to voices in the Middlebury community.

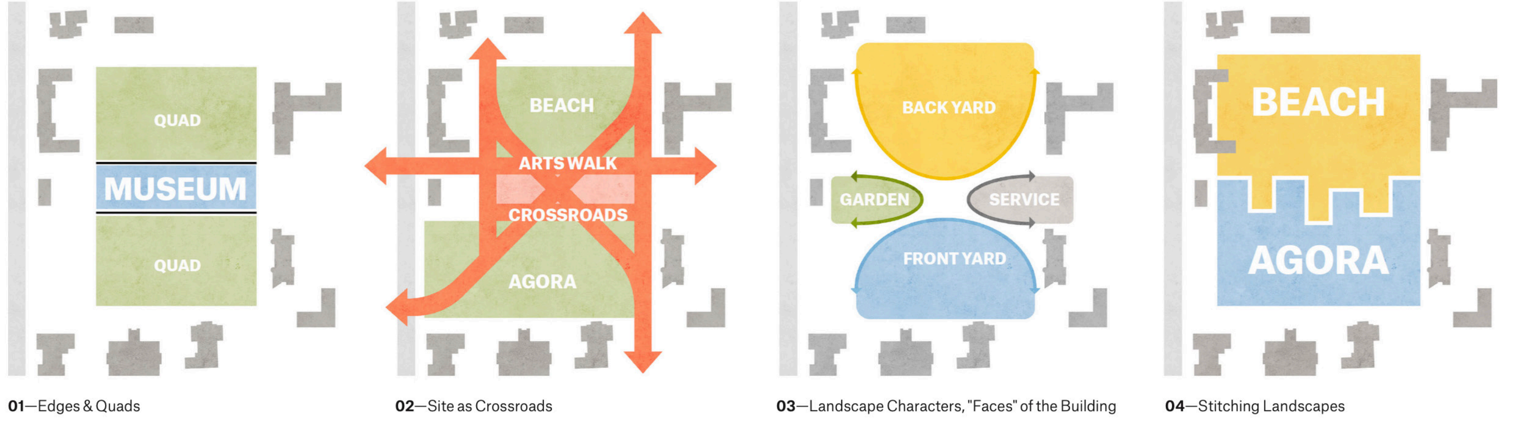
“[The SSL is] helping us with research and dialogue and drafting a sustainability charter that will be a roadmap for that specific piece of the project,” Grassinger explained.

Le added that although Allied Works is taking student input, their focus seems to be on connecting with alumni and faculty. Le also mentioned that he would prefer not to have a museum, instead wishing the college would place more focus on access to student mental health services or dormitories.

On top of sharing these priorities, Le shared both his mixed thoughts on the design direction in which the museum is going.

“As an architecture student, I feel like the new conception for the art museum provides a lot of access to outside community interest for our college campus. While the design provides a lot of outwards spatial location for students to host activities and art events, I do think that reconsidering a more modern take to architecture is more harsh to Middlebury’s environment,” Le said. “The new sign places a lot of emphasis on modern, abstract shapes.”

Armed with student input, the architects behind the new museum are proceeding at full steam ahead, with plans to finalize the museum design by next spring and to tear down Battell Hall in 2026 to make room for the latest addition to Middlebury’s changing landscape.



COURTESY PHOTO/ ALLIED WORKS

The architects presented this concept plan for the new art museum set to open in 2028 where Battell Hall currently stands.

Allied Works—Arts & Education expertise

COURTESY PHOTO/ JOHN MCLEOD

Architects from Allied Works gathered with Architecture Department faculty and students to discuss the developing plans for the new art museum.

SNOW BOWL HOSTS THIRD ANNUAL STUDENT SKI DAY

By **NOAH WILLSON**
Contributing Writer

The Snow Bowl hosted its third annual Middlebury College Student Ski Day on Friday, March 7, a new tradition designed to promote local snow sports. First held in 2023 as an opportunity to provide the student body with easy access to skiing and snowboarding, on Student Ski Day the Snow Bowl provides students with lift tickets, waiving the cost of a day pass so they can ski for free.

In addition to ticket-free skiing, this year’s lineup featured a live band and free Snow Bowl merchandise giveaways. Though the variable weather conditions led to relatively low overall turnout, those who did attend enjoyed the atmosphere.

Julia Roth ’25 was one of the participants in the day’s events who felt a deep connection to the college’s ski mountain.

“The Snow Bowl is such a special place… I feel like you’re always bound to see other students,” she said.

Snow Bowl General Manager Kim Essensa was pleased with the day, noting that its crossover with a ski patrol alumni event generated a great sense of community.

“It’s really special, you know, the alumni that you see come back here year after year,” she said in an interview with The Campus.

To Essensa, the Snow Bowl and the college share a notable link. “It’s a unique, tight-knit community… and its foundation is the college.”

As the sun set on the Green Mountains, live music kicked off in the lodge. Amid the backdrop of a roaring fire, a crowd huddled around the local guitarist and singer Bob Recupero, enjoying the ambience.

Community is at the heart of the Middlebury College Snowbowl. A close link between student life and the Snow Bowl is fostered by a number of activities; from J-Term ski lessons to Feb graduation and the Winter Carnival, the Snow Bowl provides a second home for some students. Essensa said she has seen this connection firsthand every winter.

“It’s really nice just to see how many students come up and ski all the time,” she said.

Roth shared a similar sentiment, expressing her gratitude for the mountain’s proximity to campus and offerings for students.

“I love that Middlebury has this infrastructure in place so that more students can access outdoor recreation during the winter,” Roth said.

While overall student turnout to the Snow Bowl that day was low, Essensa noted that this was mostly due to inclement weather. Undeterred, Essensa said that the Snow Bowl team is looking forward to how it can enhance next year’s festivities.

“I think what it really does is give you some ideas for next year on how to make it bigger and more fun,” Essensa said. As the Snow Bowl continues to develop its annual celebration of skiing in the coming years, Essensa said students can expect even more opportunities to gather, ski and share their love of winter sports.

NOAH WILLSON / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Student Ski Day began in 2023 as a way to increase accessibility for skiing through free lift tickets and events at the Snow Bowl.

MIDDLEBURY CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY DURING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

By IVY TAN
Contributing Writer

COURTESY PHOTOS/ QINLAN WANG

Chinese Society members and students at their event learned Nüshu calligraphy and made bookmarks.

Student organizations and faculty came together on Saturday, March 8 to commemorate International Women's Day as part of Women's History Month, a celebration every March since the 1980s. From cultural events to group bonding activities, this year's festivities reflected Middlebury's commitment to honoring women's achievements and voices.

The Chinese Society collaborated with Middlebury's Chinese department to launch a series of events to bring Chinese perspectives to women empowerment.

They hosted a calligraphy event in Nü Shu, a script only used by women from rural communities in China. Instructed by self-taught Chinese Society members, students engaging in the event learned how to write Nü Shu and designed bookmarks with meaningful words or quotes related to women's empowerment.

Yuzhuo Wang '28, who helped organize the calligraphy event, explained the choice of Nü Shu for International Women's Day.

"Nü Shu speaks for women's stories," she said in an interview with The Campus. "It has sharp, vertical strokes that convey strength and desire."

In addition to the calligraphy event, the Chinese Society and the Chinese Department screened a Chinese movie "Send Me to the Clouds" (2019), directed and written by female director Teng Congcong. Chinese widespread social media consider it "the most feminist-conscious film in China in the past decade."

Thomas Moran, the John D. Berninghausen professor of Chinese and department chair, described why his department chose to screen the movie last week.

"It offers a contemporary look at China, which isn't often seen in film. It's a decent choice for a feminist-themed screening without being too intense or depressing for a celebration like International Women's Day," he said.

The Russian and East European Society also celebrated the holiday by organizing the event "International Women's Day: Write a Letter!" in the Anderson Freeman Center (AFC). Suggested by Tamari Kuzanashvili '27, an international student from Georgia, the event provided space and materials for students to write a letter to any woman in their life.

Fueled by free snacks and drinks, participants carefully wrote their letters. Noemi Zendejas Rodriguez '26, a member of the Russian and Eastern European Society, reflected on her experience at the event.

"It was lovely to see students take a moment to sit down and write kind and thoughtful words to an important woman in their life. I think it was a great way for students to reflect on the women in their lives, whether it was their mother, grandmother, professor, etc., and appreciate and acknowledge them," Zendejas Rodriguez wrote in an email to The Campus.

Victoria Perez '27 attended the event and shared her perspective on the significance of International Women's Day.

"In Mexico, this day is about activism and consciousness. Given the high rate of femicides, March 8th is a powerful day of remembrance and protest. Women march to be the voice of those who no longer have one," she wrote. "Some schools even participate in symbolic acts where women refrain from attending class or work to highlight the impact of their absence."

To celebrate this month, Middlebury's chapter of The Women's Network launched a new series celebrating female business owners in Middlebury. Their first spotlight was on Becky Dayton, owner of Vermont Book Shop.

In the group's Instagram post, Becky Dayton shared her encouragement for young female entrepreneurs.

"If I were to give one piece of advice to young women entrepreneurs, it would be simply: believe in yourself. You've gotten this far on your own ambition and intelligence. Onward."

President of Middlebury's chapter of The Women's Network Rose Garza '27 shared that the inspiration behind this series was to showcase that success doesn't always follow a set formula.

"We hope this series will inspire others to consider alternative routes to success by showing that with determination, following your passion can lead to remarkable achievements," Garza wrote in a message to The Campus.

The Women's Network's Middlebury chapter has held multiple discussions on how to create equitable environments for women in business, leadership and networking. So far, the organization has planned bonding events like a painting night and a "Galentine's" launch meeting with its members.

"I think being able to hear from not only Middlebury alumni but specifically female alumni is so integral to learning how to navigate corporate spaces and refreshing to hear a female perspective," Garza wrote.

This Wednesday, they will continue to honor Women's History Month by hosting a Break the Ice event on Thursday, March 13 at the Kenyon Arena. There will be a discussion on accessibility and inclusion in professional sports settings and a skating session for participants

Editor's Note: Managing Editor Madeleine Kaptein '25.5 contributed reporting to this article.

MUSLIM STUDENTS CELEBRATE RAMADAN ON CAMPUS

By ELLA CALLAHAN
Contributing Writer

COURTESY PHOTOS / MUSLIM STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Since Ramadan began on the night of Feb. 28, Muslim students have gathered to break their fast together after sunset.

With the start of Ramadan — a holy month in Islam that celebrates the gift of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammed — on Feb. 28, many Middlebury students and community members have begun to fast from sunrise to sunset each day, breaking their abstinence from food each day in the evening. Around 60 Muslim students have visited local Muslim families in town who have hosted iftar dinners, bringing people together to break their fast with a shared meal.

During this month, an emphasis is placed on giving, charity and forging community bonds. In this spirit, the Muslim Students Association (MSA) recently traveled to the University of Vermont (UVM) to have a shared iftar dinner, uniting the two Vermont colleges for the holiday

Moeini explained that many of these Ramadan celebrations are driven by students who volunteer their time in addition to keeping up with classes and fasting. Typically, MSA holds their own iftar dinners on the weekends and relies on the dining halls for dinner the rest of the week, according to Associate Muslim Chaplain and MSA advisor Zahra Moeini Meybodi.

"This is both to help sustain their budget, but also recognizes that students are busy midweek and can't attend big gatherings every night," Moeini wrote in an email to The Campus.

Atiyk Ahmeed '25, a member of MSA who has attended some recent meetings during Ramadan, mentioned that the dinners have added to their Ramadan experience at Middlebury. "I like the fact we have the dinners, it helps make the fasting experience easier and builds community," Ahmeed wrote in a message to The Campus.

Moeini also shared her perspective on how the fasting of Ramadan shows the values of Islam during the holy month.

"Muslims go on a thirty-one-day-long sprint of attending to their inner worlds to realign themselves with the moral values and ethics the Qur'an and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad profess, such as avoiding anger, gossip, ill thoughts and behavior, and material attachments," she wrote.

Even for those who are unable to fast because of pregnancy, illness or other barriers, their devotion is what matters.

"I have to always remind myself that Ramadan, at its core, is about establishing not simply ritual prayer, hunger or abstinence, but an emptying that creates space for a more sincere pouring in of a friendship with the Divine," Moeini explained.

Fasting for Ramadan can at times conflict with Middlebury's dining hall hours. As sunset occurs later in the day the closer Middlebury gets to spring — especially with daylight savings having advanced the clocks by one hour on March 9 — it can be difficult for some students to get food to break their fasts; Proctor Dining Hall closes at 8 p.m. and Atwater and Ross Dining Halls close at 8:30 p.m.

Ahmeed said that while the students have organized around iftar dinners, the college could be more supportive of Muslim students celebrating Ramadan by reinstating alternative food options that it provided in past years.

"I think Middlebury can definitely do better to accommodate students fasting, such as with more food options at dining halls," he wrote, "In previous years, we had Grille food as an option for post-dining hall time for Suhor (the meal later at night) and free to-go boxes, both of which were taken away that I think could be reinstated to make fasting a more seamless experience."

Moeini said that the community typically addresses those challenges when they arise, adding that Middlebury's dining halls have been good at providing halal food and enacting supportive policies for students with religious observances.

While many find fasting during the day for a whole month exhausting and taxing for their bodies, Moeini suggested that this may actually cause individuals to spend less energy on talking or general ill behavior, allowing the ethical changes emphasized by this holiday to occur more fully. However, because many individuals are also waking up early and going to sleep late in order to pray, it can be difficult to devote the necessary energy to school work.

"I hope professors can provide students with more flexibility in making up for assignments, taking exams, and or provide them with alternative learning opportunities when and if able to," Moeini wrote.

Editor's Note: Editor in Chief Ryan McElroy '25 contributed reporting to this article.

MIDDLEBURY RESIDENTS APPROVE $14.5 MILLION BUDGET ON TOWN MEETING DAY

Continued from Page 1

democracy in each of the state's 237 towns.

Town officials sitting on the stage presented reports and reviewed key agenda items, with current town manager Mark Pruhenski — who began his job in January — outlining the town's proposed $14.5 million budget for the upcoming fiscal year. He acknowledged the challenges in its development, citing inflation as a major driver for the 5.99% increase in the municipal tax rate over the prior year.

"Developing this FY26 budget was a challenge," Pruhenski told the room. "The Selectboard adopted a fiscal year 2026 budget that requires an increase in the tax rate from 88.94 cents to 94.27 cents."

One Middlebury resident, Ross Conrad, said he believes that the rise in prices was a result of health care tax increases; other people in the room applauded his criticism of the proposed hike.

"Not what I would actually call modest quite frankly. It's a significant increase," Conrad said to the crowd. "I'm wondering, is there anything the town can do to control health care costs? Or are we totally at the mercy of what goes on at the state and federal level? Because quite frankly, we here in Vermont and the United States, we're overcharged."

Another resident, Dave Silberman, brought up the increase in the police budget, which now totaled $2,311,650 — an increase of 30% over the past three election cycles.

Middlebury Police Chief Jason Covey responded to this concern by stating that the 4.7% increase had been mostly due to wages, as their current police department includes the most educated individuals they have ever employed.

"I believe we need the [Police Department] that we have, and I believe we need a larger PD," Covey said. "We are struggling at times to keep up with our call volume."

Other major budget drivers included capital improvement projects, employee wages and benefits, parks and recreation costs, as well as equipment maintenance and purchases.

All four articles on the floor at the meeting passed unanimously with all residents saying "aye." The other six articles, which included the wastewater treatment plant and and other improvements to local infrastructure were up for vote in a secret ballot on Tuesday.

Everyone is given the opportunity to speak and vote at Town Meeting Day, a level of equality Professor of Political Science Bert Johnson said was a unique element of the longstanding Vermont tradition.

"The Selectboard has equal status as any member of the town," Johnson said. "In terms of their voting power, their ability to speak, it is all level in that regard. That is what makes it different from a city council meeting in cities."

The town meeting was led by moderator Susan Shashok, a former Middlebury Selectboard member. Shashok has held the role since 2019, when former Vermont Governor Jim Douglas stepped down.

While many New England states have town meetings, Vermont stands out for its widespread commitment to this local form of governance, which has been in place since the late 18th century.

Town Meeting Day first occurred in 1762 in Bennington, Vt. — before Vermont was established as a state — as a way for citizens to congregate and discuss issues. Major decisions such as approving budgets, setting tax rates and funding public projects remain in the hands of town residents — often with guidance from the Selectboard and town employees.

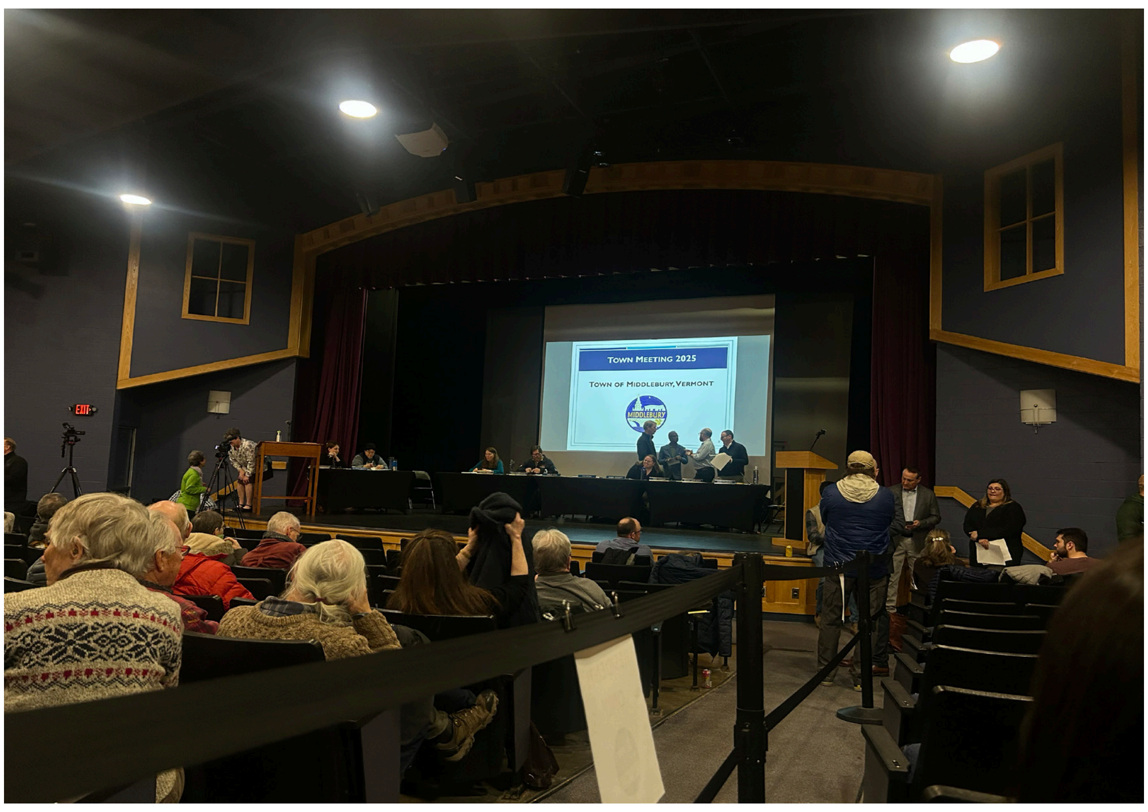
Johnson, who currently teaches a class called "Federalism, State and Local Politics," reflected on Vermont's unique opportunities for civic engagement.

"Town meeting day is a genuine example of what the political scientist Frank Bryan calls real democracy," Johnson explained. "It is people getting together in the same place to vote on issues that concern the community, and that is sometimes hard work, but you learn a lot about your community in such an event, you learn about the hardships that other people face, and for that reason, I think it is indispensable."

Non-residents, particularly Middlebury students interested in local governance, were encouraged by Johnson to attend the town meeting because it provides a firsthand look at the democratic process in action. While they may not be able to vote, students shared their interest in engaging with local issues and better understanding how decisions are made at the municipal level.

Yifan Yin '26, a student in Johnson's class, said she was eager to attend the town meeting because it aligned closely with the course's content.

"In the class, we explore the power dynamics of and between different levels of government," Yin wrote in an email to The Campus. "Professor Johnson mentioned this is a great way to observe politics at work, watching people vote on their everyday matters, and that is why I went!"



MANDY BERGHELA / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Residents across Vermont came together for the annual tradition of Town Meeting Day.

VERGENNES OPERA HOUSE TO BEGIN CONSTRUCTION FOR ALL ACCESS PROJECT IN APRIL

By MADINAH ROSEN
Contributing Writer

For the past five years, the Vergennes Opera House has been working on the All Access Project, which aims to make the historic building accessible to everyone. The project was originally planned to address the absence of an elevator, but its scope has since expanded to include additional accessibility improvements.

"We can't call ourselves 'All Access' if a performer can't get on stage or go into the dressing room," said Gerianne Smart, president of the community volunteer nonprofit Friends of the Vergennes Opera House.

Constructed in 1897, the Opera House has long served as a cornerstone of cultural and performing arts in the community, playing an essential role in the growth and cultural fabric of Vergennes and the greater neighboring region. It hosted Addison Country's first ever motion picture and has since featured numerous musical and theatrical performances. Over the years, the opera house has even welcomed notable figures such as President William Howard Taft and Tiny Tim, a prominent music icon in the 1960s.

In the 1970s, the Opera House fell into disrepair and briefly closed for restoration before reopening on its 100th anniversary in 1997. Garry Simpson, a local patron of the arts, spearheaded the restorative efforts. After the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House formed in 1993, they raised further funds to reinvest in the Opera House.

Today, the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House consists of 14 members, each bringing unique expertise to support the Opera House in organizing events, marketing efforts, fundraising and grant writing.

"I am backed by a very remarkable group of people who believe just as I do in the power of community and community spaces — that they are treasures of our community and should be maintained in a proper way and used," Smart said.

The All Access Project has been one the group's largest undertakings. In addition to the initial elevator tower, plans include a discrete lift to the stage and dressing room, which is now set to include a restroom compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The adjacent alleyway will be transformed into a more accessible courtyard, where individuals can purchase engraved bricks with their names to be placed in the space. Proceeds from the brick sales will help fund the project.

As the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House advances its accessibility initiative, Smart recalled a pivotal moment that reshaped the project's direction. While driving through town, she spotted her friend Suzanne Rood gardening beside a wheelchair. The sight prompted a stark realization:

"Who do we think we are making decisions about accessibility when all of us have no problem getting in and out?" she asked.

Smart invited Rood to join the project, ensuring a more informed approach. Since then, Smart said Rood's input has been instrumental, providing critical insights that have helped shape the initiative's development. As a writer, Rood used her skills to assist with the grant writing process and contributed her perspective from dealing with Charcot-Marie-Tooth Disease (CMT), a peripheral neuropathy condition.

"When people go forward into these kinds of projects to find someone — a community member who is really invested as much as we are, but at an even deeper level, to be part of it, is really special," Smart said.

Construction for the All Access Project is planned to start at the end of April. The plans come amidst recent clarifications to the quo of the grant money necessary to complete the project. The activity of the Trump administration initially jeopardized the congressionally directed spending grant put forward by Sen. Bernie Sanders.

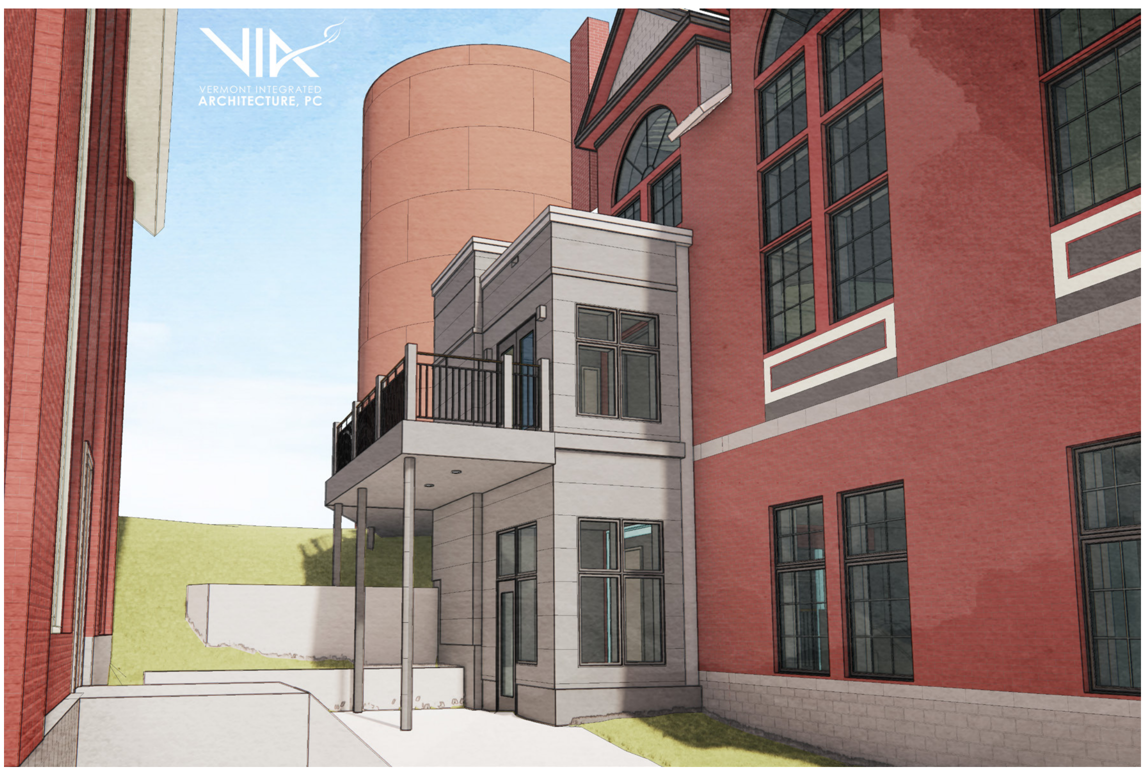
Smart received a response from the National Park Service, which is responsible for administering grant money, last week.

"New information has instilled great confidence in the project, which is all systems a go," Smart said in response to concerns.

With the construction of the new improvements estimated to take place between April and February — overlapping with the house's typical October to May season — the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House planned the Offstage Series scheduled for October 2025 to January 2026. The series will be a sequence of largely free and some ticketed performance events taking place all around the town of Vergennes. The Vergennes Congregational Church will host the annual Thanksgiving Hymn Sayings in November, and St. Paul's Episcopal Church will host the 20th anniversary of Broadway Direct — featuring professional Broadway performers — in December.

Middlebury students have been involved with the Opera House through the MiddCORE Mentorship program dating back to 2013, when a student helped conduct a survey for the Vergennes nonprofit.

"It makes a big difference, to our non-profits, having students with energy and smarts to come in with a fresh eye and work with different organizations," Smart said.



COURTESY PHOTO / VERGENNES OPERA HOUSE

The Vergennes Opera House will undergo a massive construction project beginning in April to provide inclusive access to its building.

Construction company contracted by Middlebury College addresses worker safety violations

Continued from Page 1

TOM NEVINS / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Middlebury College paid the Vermont Construction Company $45,000 in the past six years for roofing work on campus.

client on the main page of its website. Executive Vice President of Finance and Administration David Provost said the college has previously paid the company $45,000 for roofing work.

"Middlebury College has contracted with Vermont Construction Company subsidiary KSM once or twice over the last 6 years," Provost wrote in an email to The Campus. "They are not a primary contractor for the college and we don't expect to use them in the future."

The company and the Building Dignity Council are now negotiating the next stages of implementing the worker rights program, according to Will Lambek, an organizer with Migrant Justice. The partners are working to tailor the nonprofit's model to align with the industry conditions in Vermont.

"We are bringing together construction workers to discuss their vision for dignified conditions in work and housing and to codify that vision in the Code of Conduct," Lambek wrote in an email to The Campus.

Once completed, Lambek said in addition to a 24-hour support line for workers, the new program will regularly audit job sites and employer-provided housing to ensure compliance with the agreed-upon standards.

"Any conditions not meeting the standards in the Code of Conduct will be swiftly investigated, and the [Building Dignity Council] will help workers and employers to take corrective action," he added. Subcontractors who do not comply with their standards will not be allowed to work with the Vermont Construction Company, according to Migrant Justice.

On Jan. 28, Vermont Construction Company held a press conference with the Building Dignity Council, Migrant Justice and dozens of the company's current workers, in which they heralded the new partnership as a landmark agreement in line with their mission to improve Vermont's infrastructure.

"We wanted to build a company that would create great jobs for Vermonters and importantly, so that Vermonters could afford to live well in Vermont," said David Richards, co-founder of Vermont Construction Company.

The accusations against the Vermont Construction Company have shone a new light on the importance of immigrants — who are a well-known part of the state's dairy and farming workforce — to Vermont's construction industry.

Research has shown the difficult physical toll and mental stress that migrant workers in the dairy industry face; a similar kind of hard, physical labor also affects immigrant workers subcontracted for roofing and construction projects.

"Vermont will not solve its housing crisis without migrant workers. It's not gonna happen. These guys work their asses off and they deserve to live well in Vermont," Richards said at the press conference.

More than 300 migrant laborers likely work in Vermont trade industries, according to Seven Days, which reported that many are hired as subcontractors, not official employees. When a company hires laborers as subcontractors, it is not responsible for verifying their legal status.

Professor of Anthropology David Stoll, who has conducted research on how Central Americans fit into the U.S. labor market, explained that subcontracting moves legal responsibility for verifying a worker's legal status to smaller, independent subcontractors working under the main company.

"Basically, legal liability is being pushed onto multiple levels below the corporate employer, making it harder to trace," Stoll explained.

Subcontracting is especially valuable, he said, in price-competitive industries such as meatpacking or construction. Lower labor costs from using subcontractors may help a company in these fields offer more cost-effective bids to potential clients.

"The purpose of these agreements really is to devolve legal responsibility onto somebody else. And it's just become a very widespread mechanism for deep pocket employers — or for deep pocket institutions — to protect themselves," Stoll said.

Lambek of Migrant Justice acknowledged the difficulty of tracking conditions for migrant workers used by companies in Vermont.

"In industries with complicated supply chains — like dairy — or labor contracting chains — like construction — it can be difficult as a consumer or client to understand the labor conditions behind the product you are consuming or the service you are receiving," he wrote.

He also emphasized that oversight programs such as the Building Dignity Council's model should allow clients to trust that workers are being treated fairly.

Amidst Vermont's ongoing housing shortage, Vermont Construction Company has emerged as a major player in the state's construction industry since its founding in 2016. Its public list of recent clients includes local real estate companies and the Champlain Housing Trust, as well as the University of Vermont (UVM). The school's athletics department named the company as its "Official Roofing Partner" as part of a multi-year sponsorship deal, according to a press release from Sept. 11, 2024.

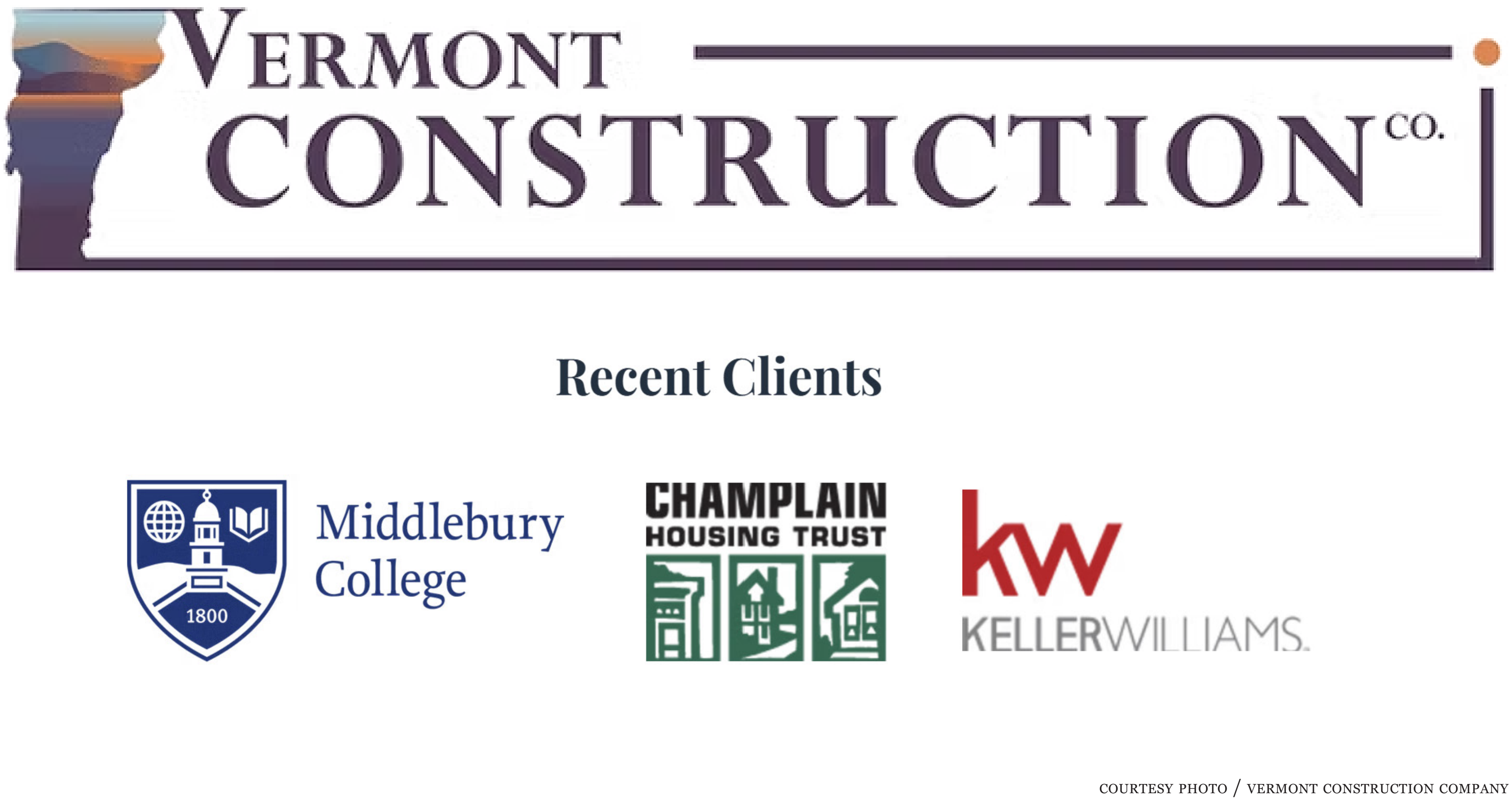
UVM said that the relationship between its athletics department and the company was a "marketing partnership," rather than a testament to past job performance.

"The relationship... is not based on work done by the company for the university. Such UVM partnerships are governed by contracts that are evaluated on a regular basis," wrote Executive Director of Communications Adam White in an email to The Campus.

Although it has not inked any sponsorship deals with construction companies, Middlebury College frequently relies on local contractors for its building projects. These include the new first year dorm set to open this summer and the new museum in the center of campus, for which the college has budgeted $50 million with a planned completion date of 2028. The college's top five independent contractors from July 2022 to June 2023 were all construction companies, to which Middlebury paid over $20 million combined for their work, according to public tax filings for that fiscal year.

As construction companies in Vermont face new scrutiny about the safety of their workers' housing and job sites, the Building Dignity program says it hopes to chart a new path forward for the entire industry.

"VCC is signaling to current and prospective clients that there will be transparent and verified standards in working conditions on the company's job sites," Lambek wrote, using an acronym for the Vermont Construction Company. "Any company who wants to do the same should follow in VCC's footsteps and join Building Dignity."



COURTESY PHOTO / VERMONT CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

The Vermont Construction Company's website prominently lists Middlebury College as a recent client.

Why Russia has not and will not use nuclear weapons in Ukraine

Op-Ed

Langan Garrett *is a member of the class of 2028.*

COURTESY PHOTO / AARUSH2007

Putin has threatened the use of nuclear weapons in the Russia-Ukraine war on multiple occassions.

There are few weapons in the world that are more useful unused. What many people don't realize is that nuclear weapons are most efficient when they remain in the silos. Nuclear weapons provide mobility, leverage and negotiating power. While we tend to focus on their catastrophic physical and psychological repercussions, their real use lies in deterrence and intimidation.

President of Russia Vladimir Putin has threatened the use of nuclear weapons time and time again during the conflict in Ukraine. Quite successfully, he has limited NATO involvement and generated fear and anxiety in the West. His erratic behavior and strong nuclear posturing leads to a credible nuclear threat. However, people must remember one key facet of the global nuclear order that has led to over seven decades of relative nuclear peace: deterrence.

Both Russia and the U.S. possess the ability to destroy each other and the world with their nuclear arsenal. The prevention of this nuclear apocalypse occurs from each side's belief that they can withstand a first strike and sufficiently decimate their adversary in a second strike. Neither side wants to make the first move, and thus a standstill occurs — known as a deterrence. There is minimal advantage in acting first, particularly in a world where information is shared within a second, and public opinion remains staunchly against the use of nuclear weapons.

But in Ukraine, Putin cannot and will not use nuclear weapons. Doing so might gain him credibility, but it would also endanger the remaining delicate diplomatic ties he still has, likely resulting in massive nuclear retaliation from the West. Putin does not want nuclear war; he wants this conflict to remain inside the borders of Ukraine and to continue to limit NATO involvement in pursuit of some kind of limited victory, perhaps maintaining control of the Donbas region. When Putin started the war, he vastly underestimated Ukrainian resolve and Western economic support while overestimating the motivation of his own troops. His nuclear threats are simply a Band-Aid over the gaping bullet wound in his political and military campaign. What little leverage remains lies in his possession of the largest nuclear arsenal on the planet.

There is an argument that Putin would utilize his nuclear arsenal in order to ensure victory or to prevent an existential threat. If he wants to turn the tide and gain a decisive victory that hands him the territory he seeks, nuclear weapons may be his best option (much like how the U.S. utilized the bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki).

But this feels unlikely. The use of tactical nuclear weapons, or on the battlefield in a counterforce situation — used to target troops, resources or supplies — seems improbable. Ukrainian troops are too mobile and agile; they do not congregate, and they have distinct environmental and landscape advantages. Russian troops are also poorly trained. In order to use a tactical nuclear weapon, the target must be secure. In addition to enough Ukrainian troops being in the same place, Putin's own forces would need to be out of harm's way if he were to deploy the weapon, making its use all the more unlikely.

Additionally, the use of a strategy in a countervalue setting ("targeting what the enemy holds dear") is even more improbable. There is a lack of strong countervalue targets in Ukraine. The nuclear destruction of Kyiv or other cultural sites would likely engender a response from the U.S. and its Western allies. In my opinion, Putin does not desire this outcome. He wants a regional conflict: a territorial dispute to take back what he believes to be part of Russia. It would be a catastrophic miscalculation — and potentially politically suicidal — to embroil the rest of the world in a conflict that he may no longer be willing or able to succeed in.

Putin's options are few because of the diplomatic guardrails that constrain him, but nuclear leverage remains useful, provided that he continues to posture and not use the weapons themselves. This threat is more effective than the detonation of the weapon. Putin is a political actor — he is not a trained military officer. He is surrounded by informed officials who know the realities of the global nuclear order and realize the advantages that simple threats maintain. So sleep peacefully, knowing deterrence is intact, and that the world's biggest nuclear bully is all fire and no fury.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY PROTESTS

Letter to the Editor

Elizabeth Karnes Keefe *is the former Associate Dean of Language Schools*.

To The Campus editors:

Thank you for your coverage of the demonstrations in Waitsfield, Vt. last weekend, and of "Not My Presidents Day."

Closer to home, on Saturday March 8, around 200 people gathered on the Middlebury town green and marched in support of International Women's Day and against the policies of the current American administration. Among them were professors and members of the college's senior administration demonstrating peacefully and with a direct clear message against the deeply unpopular outrages of the current government, including towards universities.

The nationwide student anti-war strike of 1970 was a massive outpouring of anti-Vietnam War protests. It was students who made the difference in ending the war.

To quote writer Jess Craven's response on Jan. 21,"As Robert Hubbell often says, "We're not potted plants." Quite the contrary. We are a force to be reckoned with. We have agency, intelligence, courage, strength, and vast numbers on our side. We have the artists. We have the educated. We have the decent majority. We have money. We have the moral high ground. We have a vast network of seasoned activists who know how to fight and have shown themselves willing to do so. We have democracy movements the world over rooting for us. We have some incredible elected officials. We have a ton of experience winning tough fights. Most importantly, we have each other."

Alas, Middlebury students were noticeably absent at the Middlebury event. This is your future and it is yours to lose if you don't show up in the face of disheartening news about rights, the climate, green energy, diversity, reproductive rights, erasure of our country's history and our basic constitutional freedoms.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Karnes Keefe
Former Associate Dean of Language Schools

Listen to WOMEN
BE BRAVE

COURTESY PHOTO / JONATHAN BLAKE

On Saturday, March 8, around 200 local residents and members of the college community protested the Trump administration in town.

LOSING FAITH OR KEEPING HOPE?

Op-Ed

George Mardsen *is an exchange student from the U.K. studying at Middlebury College this year.*

COURTESY PHOTO / ANGIE JANE GRAY

Marsden reflected on his perceptions of the U.S. in light of recent political events when he spotted an American flag blowing in the wind.

I am commonly asked by friends and family at home what the current American atmosphere is like. The past month has proven to be a dramatic shift in what America means to me.

It was a typical cold winter day in Vermont. I had woken up early to catch the morning sun, hoping that its warmth would provide some comfort and certainty despite the dreary display of recent events. I was fixated on the Feb. 28 meeting between President Zelensky and President Trump, feeling disorientated — like I had just woken from a fever dream, witnessing a nightmare materialize into reality. As I approached the campus fitness center, I saw three large flags floating in the distance. One stood out to me. Red, white and blue. Powerful and strong. The U.S. flag waved in the air.

I was reminded of where I was. As an exchange student from the U.K., I felt a wave of nostalgia, remembering the joy and excitement that these colours and ideals once sparked. I remember watching Rocky III for the first time. It was the final fight between Rocky and Drago, and Rocky walked to the ring in his bright American stripes. When all hope was lost, the United States of America was there to beat the Russians. It was a scene that seemed so far away, and the antithesis to what I felt I had just witnessed.

My desire to visit the U.S first emerged when my aunt and uncle told me about their visit to New York when I was seven years old. They described the grandness of the city, a place that exuded a dreamlike landscape: huge skyscrapers, jam-packed sports stadiums and burgers the size of my head.

The United States of America has always been the land where dreams come true. A place where prosperity, liberty and equality flourish, the epicentre of the capitalist and democratic world. But on this day, the flag began to sag and lose its posture. Maybe it was an illusion, but to me, the flag had begun to lose its glamour. It no longer made my heart feel excited. Instead, I felt disappointed. It was like finding out your childhood hero was wearing a costume and his superpowers were a fabrication made on a green screen. But, like each time Superman comes onto the screen, I still go to watch, waiting until the very last minute for him to save the day. Was this the same as what is happening today? Will the flag soon return to its powerful and strong pose? Or maybe this was the end of that story, a new era, a new America.

The post-World War II era has been built on an ideal that the U.S would guide the West to a better, fairer world — a world where inequality does not exist, and that everyone has a fair chance of the pursuit of happiness. What happens when this legacy disappears? What will become the next flag we search for? Trump's Republican party prioritizes an 'America first' attitude towards foreign policy, reshaping its image across the globe. No longer does it stand as the big brother to democracy. Instead, the U.S. has isolated itself, leaving everyone else to find a new path to future prosperity.

On that day I thought that a long swim would clear my thoughts. But, the swim was not silent. I continued to ponder the vast changes that were taking place in the landscape that I shared the last seven months. I wondered if Americans had felt a loss in their sense of self. The recent election results should tell you that overall, this is what the United States wants. But the mood in Middlebury seems different, people seem saddened — resenting the new identity their nation holds.

The inward attitude of the Trump administration is not only taking over in the U.S. It is the same across Europe, specifically with the U.K.'s Reform Party. As the former leader of the free world, the U.S. has shifted the path towards a more disconnected Western Hemisphere, laying the ground for a future disconnected Europe. Parties like the Reform Party will see Trump's success as an opportunity to seize.

At first, I was angry at the insular attitude that dominated new American policies. My anger was squashed when I was reminded of Brexit. Many of my European friends find humour in the fact that Brexit had such a profound impact on Britain, especially its impacts on my passport and my ability to travel around Europe. I desperately didn't want to be associated with it, especially since I wasn't old enough to vote at the time it happened. This is the same as today's situation. Trump has steered the U.S. onto a new path. Like Brexit, the future is very uncertain, and as a European, it feels dangerous and scary.

To find hope in a situation that seems so absolute seems pointless. I had to remind myself that America changes leaders every four years, bringing new ideas and policies with them each time. My discomfort can be short-lived. It is important to not lose hope in our ideals just because the current government does not align with our views.

So, when I look at the flag, I think of the principles I want it to define, not of the ones that it currently does. With that, I can begin to hope for the day it will hold those same ideas again.

MIDDLEBURY IS OUR HOME — LET'S START TREATING IT THAT WAY

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

The Middlebury Campus
SUSANNA SCHATZ

Over the past few months, an increasing number of incidents have disrupted shared public spaces on campus and prompted punitive responses from the college. After a series of thefts and acts of vandalism, the Anderson Freeman Resource Center (AFC) has decided to close their building after 4:30 p.m., limiting a space where cultural organizations and various students previously met, did work or shared in activities with each other. The college has announced plans to crack down on parking violations due to a high quantity of infractions this year that have frustrated college faculty and staff who need to access parking spots close to their offices. These violations of public space are not unprecedented at Middlebury — last year the college faced issues such as vandalism at The Knoll and computer monitors being stolen from Ross Dining Hall, among other incidents.

As students at a primarily residential college, we have an obligation to one another and our shared spaces, whether it is in our dorms, our community centers or even our townhouses. We should all hold each other accountable for this responsibility: tell your friends to pick up after themselves in Ross, remind partygoers at your social house that other people live there full time, and don't park in faculty or staff parking spots.

We must also be aware of the people behind the scenes that are impacted by our actions — custodial staff, dining hall workers, the Public Safety department and professors — even if we don't see them or the problems they deal with every day. Our community has a collective responsibility to create a campus culture that prioritizes respect and upholds the common space we share.

When Saturday night rolls around, some students have a habit of getting drunk and tampering with public spaces. From elevators in Atwater being doused with beer to broken furniture outside of the townhouses, getting drunk has given students an excuse to disregard the spaces around them. At a small, rural school without a major bar or club scene, the monotony of a Friday night routine coupled with pressure to have an exciting time can cause students to act out and destroy something for a laugh. While making memories is important, destruction should not be a part of your night's lore — especially when it comes at the cost of others' time and energy in cleaning up your mess. Although our actions while partying may seem inconsequential, there are many people — custodial staff, facilities, residential assistants, and more that deal with the effects.

We understand that beer will get spilled and the occasional mess made on the weekend — such is life at every college in the U.S., after all. By no means do we want to shut down parties or cancel your screws. But the morning after these events, we all have an obligation to pick up after ourselves. Clean up the beer cans left outside your townhouse so that Facilities Services isn't forced to do it for you; repair what you can and pay to replace what you can't.

Tampering with public spaces has also had more serious implications, ones that result in concrete losses for students. When study rooms, kitchens and lounges are shut down in dorms, students lose access to basic amenities that improve their college experience. When utensils, pillows, hair care products and other items are stolen — and opportunities to correct the misbehavior go ignored — spaces like the AFC are forced to drastically limit when the building can be accessed. The AFC is specifically meant for BIPOC, first generation and LGBTQ+ students, and its forced shutdown intrudes on these groups' designated safe spaces. It's unnecessary for these immature violations to happen at all.

That's not to say that we as a campus community aren't capable of doing better. In shared spaces where the equipment is expensive and hard to replace, students tend to respect regulations with a stricter attitude. In these spaces, like the WRMC studio or the Freeman International Center (FIC) music room, simple rules such as not eating or drinking in the space are typically followed, not seen as barriers to having fun. When equipment can be linked to individual use, students take extra care not to break or harm it. We should apply the same mindset to all of our shared spaces.

The college also has a part to play in initiating a change in our campus culture. It often feels like the administration picks and chooses when to respond to problematic incidents — the perpetrators of parking violations are now going to be prosecuted more intensely while the AFC remains with its doors closed after-hours. Different situations do call for varying levels of severity in the administration's response, but what the college is missing is consistency. The lack of enforced accountability from the administration maintains bad behavior because the perpetrators of vandalism and theft are not consistently sought after.

Middlebury's administration can take more action by replacing objects that have been stolen or providing funding to help compensate for losses. The college has a responsibility to go pursue culprits of serious transgressions regularly, take their violations more seriously and ensure that whatever objects have been damaged or stolen will be replaced with no burden to the affected people or organization on campus.

The paradox of Middlebury is that it is small enough for us to know almost everyone, yet just big enough to escape responsibility for petty actions. No matter the likelihood of someone tracking the perpetrator down and punishing them, we should all hold ourselves accountable, even our friends and even when partying in someone else's suite.

After all, Middlebury students are the ones who call this campus their home; we, not staff, faculty or administrators, wake up on Saturday morning to live among the wreckage of the previous night. Middlebury is our home — let's start treating it that way.

SPECS PANTHER: SEXUAL HEALTH AND ETHICAL CITIZENSHIP IN THE TRUMP

Op-Ed

Sydney Rogers *is a member of the class of 2025 and a SPECS Peer-Educator.*

SPECS Panther is a mascot for SPECS (sex positive education for college students) and serves the Middlebury community. As a part of Health & Wellness Education, SPECS Panther seeks to educate and spark independent dialogue, not be the end-all be-all resource on campus. We encourage Midd Kids to break down the walls of silence by engaging in sex-positive conversation — wherever, with whomever, and about whatever is most comfortable, easy and safe for you. Our editions will be fun and educational!

Since his inauguration on Jan. 20, 2025, Trump has issued at least 127 executive actions, aiming to dismantle federal organizations, slash the budget and disrupt staffing. From threatening the National Institutes of Health (NIH), jeopardizing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, denying the identities of transgender and other genderqueer folks and curtailing the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the executive branch is enforcing sweeping systematic changes under the guise of "efficiency."

As current college students, Midd Kids are uniquely situated to face the consequences of the Trump administration and its policies. As we will graduate from Middlebury while Trump remains in office, most of us will develop our professional and personal lives under his authority. Simultaneously, we are the next generation of voters, advocates and leaders, placing us in a crucial position to influence the future of our country. We must rely on our Middlebury education to prepare us for these realities. Middlebury's mission is to "inspire our undergraduates to grapple with challenging questions about themselves and the world, but we also foster the inquiry, equity, and agency necessary for them to practice ethical citizenship at home and far beyond our Vermont campus." The world, and the U.S., is full of challenging questions and we as students are empowered to use our experience at Middlebury to influence the future political climate.

wMiddlebury emphasizes the power of inquiry, fostering an appreciation for investigation amongst its students. The NIH is a pioneer organization responsible for U.S. medical research, endorsing studies ranging from cancer treatment to behavioral disorders to infectious diseases, all of which intersect with sexual health. On Feb. 7, 2025 the NIH announced that it would reduce funding for "overhead costs" — like maintaining facilities and equipment — by 85%. Trump claimed this would channel finances directly to research initiatives, but statistics indicate otherwise. Universities and hospitals depend on this funding for 40–75% of their indirect costs.

The overhaul of the NIH, in addition to other federal health organizations, will impact Vermont, including Middlebury. While federal courts temporarily halted cuts to the NIH, other key federal organizations remain on the brink of elimination, raising major warning signs. It is imperative that funding to institutions such as the NIH is protected since groundbreaking research relies on its support. For instance, a 2023 project from the University of California San Francisco and the University of Washington discovered the novel utility of antibiotics like doxycycline that can prevent the contraction of bacterial Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), such as gonorrhea and chlamydia, after exposure. If our nation fails to recognize the value of inquiry, our health will face the consequences.

Middlebury's mission is founded on principles of equity and agency, acknowledging the diverse needs of students, celebrating the community's range of identities and emphasizing students' autonomy in self-expression. In juxtaposition, Trump regularly attacks DEI initiatives promoting equitable access and representation throughout the branches of federal government. In a recent executive order, Trump claimed that DEI "forced illegal and immoral discrimination programs." The policies that Trump argues are "immoral" are fundamental protections that ensure equity, and without them, historically marginalized groups will continue to face barriers to education and employment.

Relatedly, another executive order issued by Trump aims to "defend women from gender ideology extremism and restore biological truth to the federal government." This action erases the recognition of transgender, intersex and genderqueer people from the American public. This is a hate-driven measure that does not promote dignity, safety or well-being, the very values he claims to be protecting. Middlebury clearly affirms students' agency by celebrating freedom of choice and gender diversity, a commitment lacking on the federal level.

Middlebury prioritizes global awareness and leadership by ensuring its students are ethical citizens. Currently, U.S. global relations are tumultuous. Trump claimed that the U.S foreign aid industry does not align with American interests. A prominent organization impacted by this directive is USAID, an agency that focuses on supporting countries affected by disaster, political upheaval or economic instability. USAID facilitates crucial programs that promote worldwide sexual and reproductive health, especially family planning, reduction of female genital mutilation and gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS prevention. USAID family planning programs have increased contraceptive access for more than 47.6 million women worldwide, promoting female bodily autonomy.

The Guttmacher Institute estimates that during Trump's 90-day funding freeze, there will be 4.2 million unintended pregnancies and 8,340 maternal deaths. Trump's decision to eradicate USAID programs leaves millions without access to basic healthcare. These are fundamental human rights and in no way "antithetical to American values."

Now the question arises: How do we proceed? The final line of Middlebury's mission statement prompts us to be ethical citizens "far beyond our Vermont campus." Consider Michigan Democratic Senator Elissa Slotkin's rebuttal to Trump's 2025 address before a joint session of Congress, where she urged people to recognize Trump's threats to democracy. She reminded the country of historical instabilities, affirming that engaged citizens and principled leaders have gotten us through these difficult moments. Slotkin stressed the impact of commitment, accountability and organization, concluding that the most important historical movements started from the bottom up.

If there is ever a time to learn, act and speak up, it is now. At SPECS, our commitment to the Middlebury student body holds steadfast. We will continue to advocate for universal human rights and education, using our position to empower Midd Kids with knowledge and support. This moment demands bold reflection on how these shifts will shape our lives and influence the global landscape and a renewed commitment to championing our core principles.

The Middlebury Campus

EDITOR IN CHIEF
*Ryan McElroy **
MANAGING EDITOR
*Madeleine Kaptein **
BUSINESS DIRECTOR
*Orly Berke **
DESIGN DIRECTOR
Eliza Bernene
DIGITAL DIRECTOR
Sheila Lam
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
James Thomas
NEWS DESK
*Maggie Bryan *†*
*Rosella Graham **
*Luke Power **
*Evan Weiss **
Hugo Zhang
LOCAL DESK
*Mandy Berghela *†*
*Izzy Ronda **
*Ben Wagner **
Agnes Wang
OPINIONS DESK
*Maya Alexander **
*Curran Amster **
*Gabi Gerig **
Charlotte Roberts
*Hannah Saraisky **
ARTS & CULTURE DESK
*Ellie Trinkle *†*
Anthony Cinquina
Virginia Frau
*Norah Khan **
Tulip Larson
*Gus Morrill **
SPORTS DESK
*Ting Cui *†*
Jonathan Buchholz
Brooke Friberg
Jack McGuire
MULTIMEDIA DESK
June Su †
COPY EDITOR
Rachelle Talbert
VISUALS DESK
Mia Levings
Idanesi Ojior
Skiles Roberts-Salvador
David Zhao
ONLINE EDITORS
Mattea Fisher
Clio Seikaly Huber
Phi Nguyen
Wendy Wang
Celina Xu
Iris Xu
LAYOUT EDITORS
Noor Khan
Henry Putnam
Gideon Wolf
PUZZLE EDITORS
Josh Harkins
Egan Turner

**Member of Editorial Board*
† Senior Editor

The Campus reserves the right to deny publication of all or part of a submission for any reason. This includes, but is not limited to: the making of assertions based on hearsay; the relation of private conversations; the libelous mention of unverifiable events; the use of vulgar language or personal attacks; unwarranted requests for anonymity.

More information about the paper and its submission policies can be found online at www.middleburycampus.com.

The opinions expressed by contributors to the Opinions section, as well as reviews, columns, editorial comics and other commentary, are views of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the newspaper. The Campus welcomes letters to the editor at 250 words or less, or opinions submissions at 800 words or less.

@middleburycampus

@middcampus

The Middlebury Campus

IN TATE MCRAE'S "SO CLOSE TO WHAT", YOUNG ADULTHOOD IS A "REVOLVING DOOR"

By ZIYING JIAN
Contributing Writer

Tate McRae's third studio album "So Close to What" (SC2W) is a masterclass in navigating young adulthood under the glare of pop stardom. At first glance, its themes may seem deceptively simple — heartbreak, reinvention and the push-and-pull of self-identity — but McRae depicts them through a dynamic blend of reverberating synths, atmospheric electronics and raw, unfiltered vocal talent. This isn't just her most polished work: it's her best yet.

Few artists have stuck with me through the years, and even fewer have grown up alongside me. McRae is an exception. Before she was a pop star, she was a 15-year-old singing "One Day" at her piano in Calgary, Alberta for an online audience of just 5,000. Now she's 21 (I'm about to be 20) and we have chased ourselves in so many different directions. While my future is still much more up in the air, she's embraced her alter ego "Tatiana," — who she describes as, "ballsy, so loud and obnoxious" — propelling herself into viral stardom with tracks like "Greedy" and "exes." It's been incredibly inspiring to watch her success as we've both grown up.

McRae's first hit single, "you broke me first," was a heartbreaker ballad released during quarantine, earning her the title of "Canadian Billie Eilish." She shed that label with the debut of her first album "she's all i wanna be," which opted for upbeat punk energy, and continues to be my favorite McRae track. Even Drake name-checks her in his latest album as "SMALL-TOWN FAME" (and we all know how Drake feels about women). Her mix of prodigious dance talent and powerhouse vocals makes her a natural heir to the Y2K pop princess throne, even gaining her comparisons to Britney Spears. However, in an industry where reputation is everything, breaking out of a mold is harder than falling into one.

With "SC2W", McRae doesn't fight the expectations placed upon her; she leans into them. McRae has adopted an unconventional strategy of playing into her given affectations, and in doing so, she delivers an album that feels both self-aware and self-assured, a statement of exactly where she stands in the ever-evolving landscape of pop.

"SC2W" crafts a soundscape reminiscent of early 2000s Britney-esque pop, with tracks like "Sports car" and "It's OK I'm OK" — both released as singles before the album was released. These songs are filled with dynamic dance-pop energy and serve as standout introductions for new listeners to explore her style and persona. The latter was one of McRae's most anticipated releases, featuring a dance break that left me absolutely stunned as she unveiled it for the first time at Madison Square Garden — a moment I was lucky enough to witness live.

If any song truly encapsulates the album's energy, it's "Miss Possessive," featuring Sydney Sweeney's striking opening line and a rhythmic, sing-song pre-chorus. A defining feature of the track is the contrast between McRae's breathy, whispered vocals and heavy electronic synths, creating an irresistible rhythm that makes listeners sway along.

"Revolving Door" explores the repetitiveness of choosing, not just in love but in other aspects of life, through the metaphor of a revolving door. The song starts off deceptively slow, but the tempo rapidly quickens, unveiling McRae's struggles with indecision as she continues to "change my mind so much I can't find it / I work so much, can't be reminded." The track also references a "night out in Boston," a line that's also featured in the title track of her "Think Later" album.

Then there's "Purple Lace Bra," one of the album's more daring tracks that drips in sensuality. The lyrics leave little to the imagination, painting vivid imagery of desire and entanglement. McRae embodies the femme fatale. Her breathy delivery heightens the song's seductive energy, lulling listeners into her world. But just as the chorus turns, the façade cracks. In a moment of lyrical brilliance, she delivers the lyric: "I'm losing my mind 'cause giving you head's / the only time you think I've got depth." Vulnerability is laid bare; beneath the seduction, beneath the sex, there's fear. Fear of being used, of being reduced to something surface-level. By the time we return to the chorus, there's a lingering sadness in her voice, making the track all the more haunting.

COURTESY PHOTO

Tate McRae's new album "So Close to What" is a portrait of young adulthood.

Of course, not every song demands intense admiration. Tracks like "2 Hands", "Means I Care" and "Signs" are solid additions, and while they serve as strong introductions to McRae's persona, they don't quite reach the same heights as the rest of the album lyrically.

She closes "SC2W" with "Nostalgia," a track where she fully steps into her role as a songwriter. Stripped down with a slow tempo, delicate guitar strums and her signature airy vocals, the song aches with a longing reminiscent of her older music.

Here, we get a rare glimpse into McRae's personal life. It's a moment of stillness, a pause in an album otherwise charged with eclectic movement, and it lingers long after the last note fades. Long gone are the days of hallway crushes and staring at boys. Instead, she delivers a lyrical gut punch: "Funny thing about nostalgia / Didn't show up 'til I lost ya." The track doesn't just capture the ache of looking back, it embodies the way time slips through our fingers.

By far, the standout track on the album is "Greenlight," which captures the struggle of wanting to move on while still feeling tethered to the past. Wrapped in an evolving house-style beat, the lyrics navigate self-doubt and the tension between seeking closure and holding on. McRae showcases her vocal prowess once again against layered percussion, urging listeners to trust themselves and take that leap of faith.

"So Close to What" isn't just an album — it's an ode to young adulthood. Its contradictions, its recklessness and its aching vulnerability. This is music that only a 21-year-old could create. Caught between self-discovery and nostalgia, between the fear of letting go and the thrill of moving forward, as she continues to evolve, one thing is clear: McRae isn't just stepping into pop stardom. She's sprinting, and we'll all be listening.

MIDD SHOP REWARDS
The MIDDLEBURY SHOP
Earn Discounts / Win Gift Cards
THE MIDDLEBURY SHOP
since 1983 — FORTH 'N GOAL
MiddleburyShop.com
68 Main Street Middlebury, Vermont
SIMON PEARCE

PIANIST IYAD SUGHAYER STRIKES ALL THE RIGHT KEYS

By YUHAN ZHANG
Contributing Writer

Jordanian-Palestinian pianist Iyad Sughayer delivered a captivating performance to a packed Robinson Hall on March 7, marking the second stop on his first professional North American tour. The performance featured four pieces by four different composers and filled the hall with energy and excitement.

His debut album, "Khachaturian: Piano Works" for BIS Records, has already been recognized as "One to Watch" by International Piano magazine, and he was named a 2022 "Rising Star" nominee by Classic FM. At the concert, Sughayer performed four pieces, each with a distinct style from different countries, demonstrating his talent across various genres.

The evening opened with Mozart's 1788 "Adagio in B Minor, K. 540." Although this piece is one of Mozart's lesser-known works, it is regarded as one of his finest. Written in a minor key, the composition evokes a sense of darkness and solitude, almost as if the composer was experiencing personal pain.

Based on the artist's interpretation, this piece could last between 5.5 minutes and 16 minutes. Sughayer played for around 10 minutes and gave a brief introduction between the first and second pieces.

YUHAN ZHANG/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
Pianist Iyad Sughayer played a range of genres at Robinson Concert Hall last week.

The next composition was "Drei Klavierstücke, D946" by Franz Schubert, a talented composer who was afflicted with illness for most of his life. The piece, performed in E major, felt quick, almost as if it was racing away from something inescapable — death. Filled with tenderness, Sughayer's performance captured Schubert's deep appreciation for life, expertly controlling the speed of the music so that each note felt imbued with emotion.

After the intermission, the tone of the concert shifted. The two guest composers featured in the second half were not traditionally considered part of the Western classical canon. The third piece of the evening, "Six Impromptus, Op. 5" by Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, blended Western classical tradition with elements of Finnish folk music.

"[Sibelius] was probably thinking: do I just try to write kind of standard classical music, be successful in the West, or do I go this Finnish Nationalist route, which no composer had done before [me]?" Professor Emeritus of Music Larry Hamberlin said during the pre-concert lecture.

Sughayer's seamless performance of the six pieces without any pause between them showcased his remarkable sensitivity to dynamic shifts, his deft range and his exceptional professionalism.

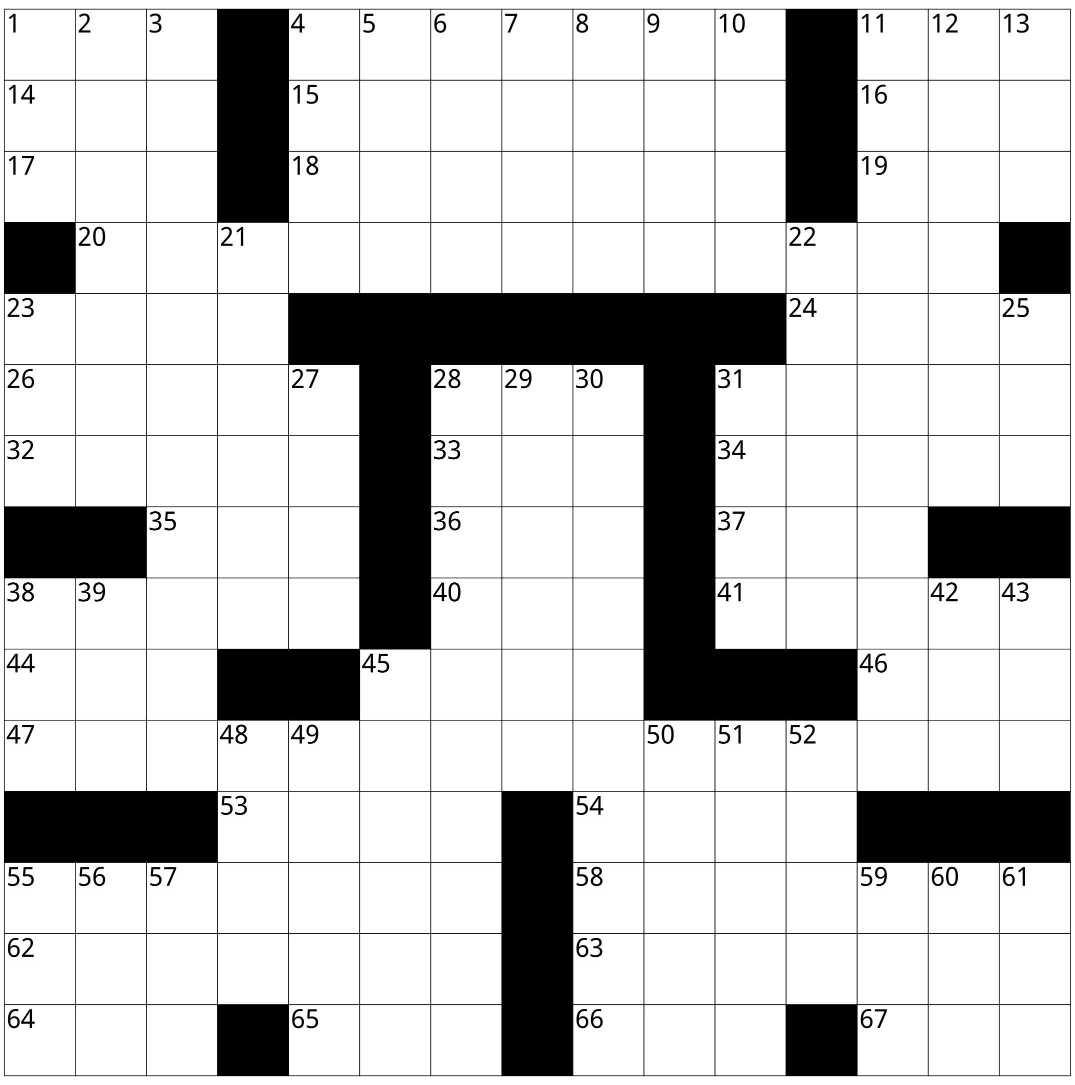
The evening concluded with a revised version of the Piano Sonata in E-flat Major by Soviet-Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian. Though Khachaturian was not a pianist, this work is vibrant and expressive, incorporating harmonies unique to Armenian folk music.

In the encore, Sughayer performed the song "Children's Album, Book 1: I: Andantino" from Khachaturian's Piano Works, featured in his debut album. Sughayer's performance was nothing short of spectacular, leaving the audience in awe.

"[This is a] program by a Palestinian-British pianist that combines unfamiliar music by familiar composers, and piano works by composers who aren't typically associated with the piano," Hamberlin said. "Especially in the second half, we hear two composers whose national identity was deeply intertwined with their music, each trying to fuse disparate musical elements. All of this resulted in some truly beautiful music that we got to enjoy, performed by a fabulous artist whom I believe we will be hearing much more from."

You're Being Irrational!

Egan Turner



ACROSS

1 "Iron Man" actor, initially
4 Savior
11 Talk excessively
14 Drink brand that featured "Bye, Bye, Bye" in their ads
15 Unbothered
16 World Cup cheer
17 Middlebury's is called Pepin
18 Appetizer synonym
19 Trendy boot brand
20 ___ / diameter = 38-Across . 40-Across 45-Across ...
23 Pearl Harbor island
24 Grp. for seniors (You're getting up there, class of '25...)
26 Printing machine
28 Ligament connecting the femur and tibia, for short
31 Leave quickly
32 Tetra-, ___-, hexa-...
33 It might follow you?
34 Singer Young and Bugs Bunny's bae
35 555, to 5-Down's speaker
36 Singer Stewart
37 1/3 of 46-Across
38 With 40-Across and 45-Across, the first digits of Friday's celebratory number
40 See 38-Across
41 Friday's holiday
44 "Sk8er ___"
45 See 38-Across
46 Two Bros. order, perhaps
47 What Friday celebrates, for the Greeks
53 "A Series of Unfortunate Events" villain
54 MiddCrew's feature cowprint
55 Capital of Georgia
58 of Magellan and of Gibraltar
62 "Severance" streaming service
63 Never-ending
64 1970s agricultural dev.
65 NNW opposite
66 "The Simpsons" neighbor
67 :'(

DOWN

1 The Notorious ___
2 Place with toddlers
3 Guitarist known for setting his instrument on fire
4 Fem. counterpart
5 Famous words from a March 15th 2,069 years ago
6 Upside-down maps?
7 Agricultural peasant
8 Start to a response to "What did you have for breakfast?"
9 Taiwanese computer co.
10 "It Happens ___"
11 "Great prediction!"
12 Africa's largest nation
13 Short dowel
21 Autumn leaves sound
22 Behind Roma and Milano, Italy's 3rd most populous city
23 Foe of slang
25 NBA stats.
27 Control S, typically
28 Band that is surprisingly not a quintet
29 Crispy hybrid breakfast treat
30 Oktoberfest wear
31 Smith to Rock action
38 "Wipeout" and "American Dad!" network
39 "Hello!", in Holland
42 You or me, for example?
43 Pirate exclamation
45 Thanksgiving dinners
48 Highway fee not found in Vermont
49 Author Wiesel or designer Saab
50 Crossroads order, perhaps
51 Messed up
52 Tyrant's title
55 Playground game
56 Heart rate meas.
57 NYSE debut
59 "Monsters, ___"
60 UNC's ___ Heels
61 Artful

DARKOOM CLUB CAPTURES LIFE AT MIDDLEBURY AND BEYOND

By ANTHONY CINQUINA
Arts & Culture Editor

Scrolling through the Middlebury Darkroom Club's Instagram page is a joy. Moments that would otherwise go unknown or forgotten by the majority of students are captured and immortalized: a magic show, a jiu jitsu match, battle of the bands and even a film projector screening of the onwwe-reel Tom and Jerry cartoon "The Cat Concerto." There is no better gallery of genuine student life than what is collected and captured by the Darkroom Club.

The Darkroom Club explores all things film-related. They loan out free cameras and developing equipment, hold workshops in which students can learn both the technical and artistic side of photography, and are always collecting and exhibiting student work on Instagram for the community to see.

"Our goal is to educate and bring together students on campus who are interested in film photography, developing film and analog cameras in general," said Finn Ellingwood '25.5, the former president and current treasurer of the club.

The club's headquarters are tucked away in the darkroom in Forest Basement. President Austin Pang '27 and Board Member Andy Gobin '27 hold weekly open hours there on Tuesdays from 6 p.m.–8 p.m. and Thursday from 5–6 p.m, but the room is accessible by ID card for club members at all times.

At the open hours, students can check out equipment, learn how to develop film and talk to club leadership directly.

"It is pretty informal," Ellingwood said. He also noted that these hours can even just be space to hang out and indulge in a hobby and passion.

The darkroom in Forest was built in 1987 after renovations to the building. At that time, the space was used mainly for developing film for the school yearbook and for The Campus. Since then, the darkroom has gradually grown into a space for common use, and now the club is primarily based on personal student photography.

The Darkroom Club has seen positive growth in recent years by making the space more accessible for students.

"It used to cost like 120 dollars for you to get access to the darkroom, and you used to have to pay for film, but now we have a budget and it's free," Ellingwood said. "We have the most members now that I have ever been in the club with."

Pang also has a positive outlook on the future of the club and said he is planning some unique events for the coming months. He wants the club to oversee photography competitions, to which any student can submit their work for judging. Pang also plans to host outdoor projector film screenings as the weather gets warmer and put together pop-up photo booths around campus. For Pang, accessibility to photography is essential to the club's ethos.

"It doesn't take a long time to get introduced to film," Pang said. "It's way easier than people imagine."

While the resources the Darkroom Club offers are certainly improving, the growth of the club also stems from a cultural transformation. Like vinyl records and the turntable, film photography has recently drawn a passionate fanbase of young people whose artistic and technological sensibilities trend "retro." The Darkroom Club offers an outlet for that passion and allows photographers of different skill levels to get a foot in the door, literally.

Ellingwood mentioned that it has not all been smooth sailing for the club. One challenge the club has recently faced is keeping sufficient materials free and accessible to all as film photography becomes more popular.

As cliché a sentiment as it is, there is something magical about film photography and video. Generations of art history are built into the technology, and seeing people who have never lived in a world without digital technology embrace that history is incredibly touching. The student photography emerging from the club immortalizes life at Middlebury in a way that digital photography cannot quite accomplish.

COURTESY PHOTOS / MIDDLEBURY DARKROOM CLUB

Middlebury's Darkroom Club helps making film development more accessible to students.

ESSEN
ESSEN
ESSEN
ESSEN FAST SLOW FOOD
NYC

MEN'S LACROSSE DOMINATES BOWDOIN COLLEGE AT HOME, SETTING UP FOR A SUCCESSFUL SEASON

By SPENCER RALPH
Contributing Writer

Last Saturday, the #15 nationally ranked Middlebury men's lacrosse team hosted #7 Bowdoin College in its home opener. Despite a chilly breeze dropping the temperature to single digits, fans and families scattered throughout the stands at Youngman Field, rooting for the Panthers to get into the win column for the first time this season.

The game had all the makings of a NESCAC classic; Middlebury faced Bowdoin three times last season, losing in the regular season and winning in the NESCAC semifinals before ultimately coming up short again in the NCAA quarterfinals. The Panther-Polar Bear rivalry was apparent from the start. The first two quarters consisted of intense battles on the attack and defense, with the Panthers going into halftime with a 5–4 lead.

The second half was a completely new story. Head Coach Dave Campbell put it best, describing his team's season so far.

"We've been pretty inconsistent overall, some good, some bad," he told The Campus.

The Polar Bears went on a 9–2 scoring run, ultimately securing a 13–7 victory.

So far, the Panthers' opponents have consisted of top-caliber teams in the early season — Amherst College, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) and Bowdoin — that have been ranked in the national top 10. Campbell said his players knew they were starting off against some of the best teams in the country this year.

"We have faced three very good teams to start the season and we knew that going in," he said. Despite the winless start, the Panthers still hold the 16th best ranking in the nation, a testament to how difficult their schedule has been.

"We have good players all over the field, and we need to play better as a team overall," Campbell stated. "I believe our best lacrosse is ahead of us and that we will be playing our best when the playoffs roll around."

Reaching the NESCAC championship and NCAA quarterfinals in back-to-back years, the team's identity has been rooted in success. Historically, the Panthers won three consecutive national championships (from 2000 to 2002) and seven straight NESCAC Championships (2001–2007). This season especially, the Panthers look forward to sealing the deal, potentially winning their first conference championship since 2007.

The other storyline of the game was the battle between former high-school teammates: Middlebury's Nick Marvin '28 and Bowdoin's Casey Ryan. The two played a game of tango in the opening minutes, with Ryan assisting Bowdoin's first goal, before a solo response by Marvin to open the scoring for the Panthers.

The journey to the team's first win this season continues this week when they host Union College (1–3), before going on the road against Bates (4–0) and #20 Babson (4–1) this coming weekend.

"We need to work hard and enjoy the ride and we'll get where we want to be," Campbell concluded.

COURTESY PHOTO / TODD BALFOUR

Cooper DeMallie '28 scored a goal in the second quarter against Bowdoin.

PANTHERS SOFTBALL SWEEPS CLARKSON IN SEASON-OPENING DOUBLEHEADER

COURTESY PHOTO / WILL COSTELLO

Samantha Hausman '25 struck out eight batters in the first game, helping Middlebury secure a 3–1 victory over Clarkson.

By BROOKE FRIBERG
Sports Editor

Last Thursday, Middlebury softball held its season opening doubleheader at home against Clarkson University, winning both games. After a strong season last year with a 23–12 record, the Panthers are looking to build on previous successes as they start the 2025 season.

"Last year we missed the NCAA tournament by one game, so this year we have a chip on our shoulder and expect nothing less for ourselves than a bid to the NCAAs," Kelley Dever '27 told The Campus. "We've worked extremely hard in the off season to prepare for the season and we are ready to go!"

In the opening game against Clarkson, the Panthers took the victory, winning 3–1. Three hours later, they won the second game by an even greater margin, 5–1.

In the opener, Middlebury wasted no time setting the tone. Kristyn Carroll '26 set the tone early with a leadoff double at the bottom of the first inning, then McKenna Lont '26 reached first on a fielder's choice. After Lont stole second base on a wild pitch, Olivia Scholes '27 hit a double, bringing both runners home for an early 2–0 lead. Jennifer Westphal '26 later added to the team's tally with a groundout that brought Scholes home. With strong teamwork and momentum in the first inning, Middlebury controlled the rest of the game.

At the top of the third inning, Westphal stopped Clarkson from getting on the scoreboard with a hustle play that ended with pitcher Samantha Hausman '25 tagging out a Clarkson player at home plate. The Golden Knights eventually got on the board with a solo home run in the fourth, narrowing the gap 3–1.

With no scores on either side in the fifth inning, Carroll threatened to extend the lead in the sixth after stealing second and third base off a single, but the Panthers couldn't bring her home. Nevertheless, Middlebury held on, securing the win without needing a final at-bat.

Just a few hours later, the Panthers and Golden Knights faced off again, for the second game of their doubleheader. It seemed as if the tables may have turned when Clarkson reached the scoreboard first off an RBI single, but Middlebury quickly responded. Westphal reached home on a fielding error to tie the game at the bottom of the second inning.

With a quick three outs to start the third inning, the Panthers were prepared to break the tie. With two runners on base, Uma Corcoran '28 hit a single to bring Scholes home. Later that inning, Westphal took advantage of another throwing error by Clarkson, crossing home and tallying the Panther's total to three runs. Middlebury tacked on two more runs in the fourth, as Carroll scored on a catcher error and Olivia Fleming '28 crossed home and put the Panthers at a 5–1 advantage.

Clarkson made a final effort to gain their momentum back in the seventh, loading the bases with two outs, but Emily Ye '28 forced a flyout to center field, officially sealing the Panthers' second victory of the day.

These wins mark the start of what the team said is sure to be a season full of teamwork, hard work and success for the Panthers.

"I think a successful season for us would be to be a tough competitor in the NESCAC, and winning the championship would obviously be extremely exciting and something I would love to accomplish with my teammates this season," Abby Jankowski '25 said.

The team's fearless baserunning, unstoppable hitting and dominant pitching will be key as the Panthers look ahead to their next series of games taking place over spring break.

"We are looking to come back from Florida with a bunch of wins that will set us up nicely for NESCAC play. Those games are a lot of fun, tons of rivalry and history between teams that only ups the stakes. There is no bad team in the NESCAC, so really it's who shows up to play and compete the hardest that wins," Dever said.

On Monday, the Panthers hosted Castleton University for another doubleheader, with back-to-back 8–0 wins in a mere five innings each time. Highlights from Monday's games include Lont, who went five-for-five at the plate, Carroll's three RBIs, and Hausman, who only allowed one single and struck out four batters. These additional victories improved the Panthers' record to an impressive 4–0 winning streak.

The team will hope to continue their momentum as they prepare to participate in the largest collegiate softball event, THE Spring Games, where they will face top competition from teams all over the country in Florida.

MIDDLEBURY SKI TEAM PLACES SIXTH AT NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS, BEST FINISH SINCE 2008

Continued from Page 1

had a full squad with three men and three women competing across all events.

"It was really special to be competing on the East Coast with the whole team there," Logan Moore '25 said. "All our friends came as well, so it was awesome to race in front of them. I'm really proud of the team as a whole and how we race and hold ourselves with composure."

Throughout the winter, the Panthers consistently finished in the top three spots in six of eight carnivals against the East's elite program This included runner-up finishes at both Dartmouth and on their home mountain, where they accumulated their most points since 2019 (877.5) and landed in the top two spots in each discipline.

"Finishing ahead of schools like Montana, Alaska and University of New Hampshire that are full scholarship D1 schools is really impressive," said Head Alpine Coach Stever Bartlett. "With all the European talent those big schools can bring in with scholarships, to be competitive with that group in both Alpine and Nordic feels really good."

Three Panthers earned All-American honors: Bradshaw Underhill '25 in slalom and giant slalom, Moore in the 20K freestyle, and Shea Brams '26 in the women's 20k freestyle.

The championships offered a fitting finale to a dominant collegiate career for Underhill, the college's alpine standout. The senior — who first claimed the Eastern Intercollegiate Ski Association (EISA) Bib Leader title in both disciplines during the regular season — secured First Team All-American status with fourth in the giant slalom and Second Team honors with sixth in the slalom. His fourth-place showing marked the highest finish for a Middlebury alpine skier since 2018.

"I had aspirations for some better results," Underhill said. "I was three-tenths out of the podium on Wednesday and three-tenths out of the win on Friday, so that was a bit hard to swallow. But I'm very excited to get All-American honors and help Middlebury finish high in the standings."

Over the course of the winter, Underhill made the podium seven times, winning four giant slalom events and three slalom races, including a dominant sweep of both events at the Middlebury Carnival.

On the Nordic side, Moore delivered a performance for the program's record books. He earned First-Team honors with fifth-place in the 20k freestyle (45:48.9) — the best finish for a Middlebury men's Nordic skier in a decade — after a disappointing performance earlier in the week.

"On Thursday, I just had a bad race," Moore said. "There wasn't an explanation. Sometimes you just don't have a great day. I was really looking forward to Saturday because I knew I was gonna have a pretty good shot at doing well, and then I just went out and gave it hell, and it went really well."

Brams earned Second Team All-American honors with ninth place in the women's 20K freestyle. Her time helped the women's Nordic squad accumulate 48 points in the event — the second-highest discipline total for the Panthers.

The team's depth proved crucial to their overall high finish. Rookie Nicholas Unkovskoy '27 made his NCAA championships debut with a 13th-place finish in the giant slalom and 24th in the slalom. Mika-Anne Reha '25, competing in her third championship, secured 17th in the slalom and 20th in the giant slalom. Sophia Tozzi '26, in her second straight NCAA appearance, placed 26th and 27th.

In the 7.5K classic, the women's nordic team put together one of the championships' most impressive collective performances with Brams, Maggie Wagner '26 and Sofia Scirica '27.

"The women's race in the 7.5 kilometer classic on Thursday was probably my highlight," said Head Nordic Coach Andrew Johnson. "The way all three of them skied, including Sofia, who's a first-time qualifier, and the fact that they put together a team result that was fifth place on that day—I was really pleased and proud."

Mason Wheeler '26 paced the men's nordic squad in the classic with an 18th-place result, while Jack Christner '25 finished 25th. Christner, an EISA Second Team honoree, had tallied top-10 finishes in six of seven disciplines during the regular season.

The coaching staff for both teams credited their success to training environments and team culture. The Panthers' proximity to Rikert and the Snow Bowl provides an edge, while Bartlett has built a community with assistant coaches Santi Fernandez and Abby Copeland.

"We're one staff. They do the same hard work," Bartlett emphasized, who was recently named EISA Coach of the Year. "We focus on team culture and how athletes will fit with us. It's not only about hard work but inclusivity amongst our team. If you're Brad winning seven races or a first-year skiing one carnival, we're all the same — that's what we drive home."

Johnson takes a similar approach with the Nordic team.

"We keep a smaller team with the goal of providing more resources, both in terms of financial support and racing opportunity, but also in coaching support. Our athletes tend to be younger and more local compared to D1 programs that get older European athletes," he said.

The Nordic team implemented a "pre-camp" approach to prepare for the championships, moving athletes off campus a week and a half before the event to minimize the risk of illness and focus on the Champs.

The future looks especially bright for the women's Nordic team, which returns its entire squad next season.

"They're going to have seniors next year that are just going to be unbelievable and kind of be a backbone to the success," Moore said.

For seniors like Underhill and Moore, the NCAA Championships represented their final collegiate competition, though both plan to pursue professional skiing careers.

The Nordic team will compete at one more race series this year in Lake Placid after spring break before the end of their season.

As Vermont's racing season concludes and spring approaches, the Panthers can look back on a season that honored the program's rich tradition with top-six finishes in every competition, while pointing toward an equally promising future.

"With our young talent and the leadership we've seen this season, we're excited about the future of our program," Bartlett said.

SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH ALEXA MUSTAFAJ '25, WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

By VICTOR KORTE
Contributing Writer

Historic. Grand. Monumental. These are the words that can be used to define Alexa Mustafaj '25's Middlebury basketball career. Sadly, the era is coming to an end, but it will be remembered forever. She broke the all-time scoring record for Middlebury women's basketball (1,628 points) and then added another half thousand points to finish her career at a staggering 2,180 all-time points. She averaged 22.5 points per gam and led the NESCAC in points per goal. In this edition of Seven Questions, Mustafaj reflects on her time at Middlebury, plans for the future and considers the memories from Middlebury basketball she will cherish forever.

Victor Korte: Every great hooper has an origin story. When did you start dribbling a basketball, and how did you fall in love with the sport?

Alexa Mustafaj: Since when I can remember, I think around third grade. I come from a big basketball family, so immediately once I picked up the basketball and knew how competitive it was, I loved everything about it. I fell in love with the sport growing up and playing with my older brother, and two boy cousins. Everyday after school we would play 2v2, with me being the only girl, until the sun went down. Never once did they take it easy on me, elbows always flying around, and I think developing my skills with them is what made me so competitive and have such a passion for the sport.

VK: Game day is always a good day. Do you have any pre-game rituals like LeBron James's chalk toss or Jayson Taytum's ear tugging that gets you into the flow state and ready to ball out?

AM: If you ask any of my teammates, they would tell you I am the most superstitious person they know. Stemming from my high school varsity team, my team was insanely superstitious with the pre-game rituals, to the extent of where my coaches bought in and did everything the same for almost two full years on game days due to our winning streak. So I definitely carried that into college, and have many pre-game rituals starting with my meals for the day, and the amount of shots I put up before the game. I also wear the same shoes the entirety of the season, never changing them, even if they become so worn out.

VK: What are some of your favorite pre-game songs that get you hyped for game day?

AM: I don't have any specific songs I play each and every game day, but I am a very big EDM fan, thanks to my teammate Augusta Dixon, so we bond over that and always blast it on the bus and in the gym until the speakers almost blow out.

VK: Setting the all time scoring record for Middlebury women's basketball is an impressive achievement. Who has been your biggest influence or mentor during your time at Middlebury?

AM: I would have to say my other brother. He is two years older than me, and played four years of college basketball at Vassar. He was definitely the hardest on me growing up, being a competitive older brother, but has been such a great role model these past four years. Since he experienced it all before me, he has always been there throughout, as my biggest supporter and number one fan in all my accomplishments, as well as during times where it gets hard and I need some advice. I always know I could go to him, and that is something I'll be forever grateful for.

VK: If you had to choose a favorite memory from Middlebury basketball, what would it be?

AM: Definitely the triple overtime win against Tufts my junior year. Having it be on senior day too, there were so many fans in the crowd, and it was electric — I had never played a game that lasted that long. To get to beat them, in our last home game at Pepin, for the first time in about 20 years, with everyone there and then to celebrate with family and friends afterwards is something I will remember forever.

VK: What will you miss most about Middlebury basketball?

AM: The things that I will miss most about Middlebury basketball are the long bus rides, team meals and the locker room. I am so grateful I had the opportunity to be on such connected teams throughout my time here, that the girls that I played with are like my sisters and will be my friends forever. Annoying each other on long bus rides, and eating team meals together on the road in the middle of nowhere is what I am truly going to miss more than anything else.

VK: As you are graduating this year, what are your plans after college? Is basketball involved in your future, or are you pursuing a different career?

AM: I don't have any big basketball plans after college, unfortunately, besides just practicing at home with my younger cousins who are in high school. Since my passion for sports and basketball is so strong, following graduation, I am pursuing a career in the Sports & Entertainment industry.

14
MIDDLEBURY
12
M
Wilson
NCAA

COURTESY PHOTO / WILL COSTELLO

Alexa Mustafaj '25 leaves a lasting legacy, finishing her Middlebury basketball career as the program's all-time leading scorer with 2,180 points.